

THREE COUNT

**Professional Wrestling Newsletter
by Alex Marvez**

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WCW ANNOUNCES STARRCADE: BATTLE BOWL SET FOR DEC. 29

World Championship Wrestling has announced plans for Starrcade '91, and it's not what most wrestling experts predicted or what most wrestling fans want. The group will conduct Battle Bowl, a tournament involving both tag-team matches and a battle royal, on the Dec. 29 pay-per-view show telecast from Norfolk, Va.

The concept has 40 WCW wrestlers participating in a tag-team tournament, with wrestlers matched at random through a lottery. For example, such odd match-ups as Rick Steiner and Larry Zbyszko or Lex Luger and Sting could be drawn as partners. After 10 tag-team matches with the losing team being eliminated, the 20 remaining wrestlers will participate in an over-the-top battle royal to crown the champion. No prize has yet been decided upon for the winner.

The lineup comes as a surprise to those who were expecting Sting to wrestle Luger for the WCW title at Starrcade '91, especially because WCW will probably need a hot issue to sell the show in light of the saturation of pay-per-view shows this fall. The World Wrestling Federation will conduct two pay-per-view shows prior to Starrcade (the Survivor Series Nov. 27 from Detroit and a yet-to-be-named show Dec. 3 from San Antonio), as well as the Royal Rumble in mid-January. There is also the Mike Tyson-Evander Holyfield boxing match in mid-November, which may sap some of the pay-per-view sales from both groups.

The last pay-per-view tournament conducted by WCW was at Starrcade '89, with a singles and tag-team tournament conducted. While the show had hot angles promising "dream" match-ups like The Road Warriors vs. The Steiner Brothers, Sting vs. Luger, and a large potential audience because of high television ratings entering the card, the '89 Starrcade had a disappointing 1.3 buy rate of an estimated 12 million universe. (The preceding Halloween Havoc and Wrestle War '90 two months later both had a 2.0 buy rate). Ironically, Starrcade '89 was one of WCW's best pay-per-view shows ever. The WWF's "gimmick" pay-per-view shows (Royal Rumble and Survivor Series) also lag far behind in buy rate from its Wrestlemania and Summer Slam cards, which feature traditional wrestling match-ups and an established main event. That may be part of WWF owner Vince McMahon's thinking in putting a Hulk Hogan-Undertaker main event at Survivors, and having a strong undercard (led by the Ultimate Warrior-Sergeant Slaughter title change) at last January's Royal Rumble.

Starrcade was the most important annual event for the National Wrestling Alliance in the mid-1980s. The first Starrcade was held in 1983, and was headlined by Ric Flair defeating Harley Race for the NWA heavyweight crown. The show was a sell-out in Charlotte, N.C., and was successfully shown on close-circuit television throughout the South. Starrcade '87 was the first attempt at a pay-per-view show by Jim Crockett Promotions, but the card was offered on less than a dozen cable systems nationwide because the WWF's inaugural Survivor Series was shown during the same time slot. When WCW bought Jim Crockett Promotions, the group's first pay-per-view show was Starrcade '88, headlined by Flair defeating Luger.

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LETTERS

Dear Alex:

Can you give us background information on **The Big Boss Man** and **The Untouchables**? Also, whatever happened to **Big Van Vader**, and **Hawk W. Hogg**? Will **D.C. Drake** ever go to **WCW** or the **WWF**?

-- **Lee and Matt Altomare,**
Coral Springs, FL

AM: The Boss Man's real name is **Ray Traylor**. He was really a prison warden for the **Cobb County Correctional Institution** before entering the wrestling business in 1985. He weighed about 400 pounds then, and worked as a "jobber" (preliminary wrestler) in the now-defunct **Continental Wrestling Federation**. Traylor came to the **National Wrestling Alliance** as **Big Bubba Rogers**, the silent bodyguard of **Jim Cornette**. Traylor improved drastically as a wrestler, and was made the **Universal Wrestling Federation** champion when the **NWA** bought the group in April of 1987. Traylor entered the **WWF** in 1988 as the villainous **Boss Man**, headlining a successful feud with **Hulk Hogan**. He turned "babyface" in January of 1990, and is currently feuding with **Irwin Rotunda Shyster**. The **Mr. Hughes** character now in **WCW** is based on the **Bubba Rogers** role Traylor played.

Big Van Vader (Leon White) will return to **WCW** in October. He has toured **Japan** and **Austria** since his last stint in **WCW** in February. I don't expect **Drake**, an independent wrestler in the **Northeast U.S.**, to pop-up in either group. I don't have any background on either **The Untouchables** (of **Windy City Wrestling Fame** in **Chicago**) or **Hogg (???)**, but if any readers do, please submit a letter.

Dear Alex:

Are **Bret Hart's** other brothers, **Bruce** and **Owen**, currently wrestling? If so, where, and do you see any chance they may join **Bret** in the **WWF** in the near future?

Is it possible to submit promotional outlines to the various federations? At times, I think I have very interesting ideas, most better than some that recur too often in wrestling today.

Why have we seen so little of **The Barbarian**? Also, what do you think is the major problem **WCW** has in maintaining continuity in their feuds? They can't seem to ever keep

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anything on track. I realize some of it has to do with the constant turnover in talent, but it appears they cannot even hold onto *any* talent for a considerable length of time or to even finish one feud (i.e. **Nikita Koloff**, **The One Man Gang**, **The Hardliners**).

-- **Steve Smith, North Miami Beach**

AM: **Owen Hart**, who wrestled as **The Blue Blazer** in the **WWF** from 1988-90, now wrestles for the **New Japan Wrestling Alliance**, and looks fantastic. He had a stint in **WCW** in April, but he was booked for so many foreign tours (**Mexico**, **Austria** and **Japan**) that **WCW** didn't even bother booking him for future dates (Why they even bothered putting him on television in the first place remains a mystery). **Bruce** wrestles semi-regularly in **Calgary**, but with the closing of **Stampede Wrestling** in 1990, he doesn't have too much to do with the sport anymore. I don't see either brother entering the **WWF**. **Owen**, who was regarded as one of the three best wrestlers in the world when he entered the **WWF**, still has awful memories of being used in a preliminary role there. He is also making a comfortable living elsewhere. **Bruce** is too small (5-10, 215) for the **WWF**. Even if both wanted to come in, though, I don't think the **WWF** would be interested in teaming them with **Bret**, because the group wants to make a singles wrestler out of **The Hitman**.

Most promoters are too close-minded to accept ideas from fans, even if they are good ones, let alone from others in the wrestling industry. From personal experience, I suggested to **WCW** more than two years ago to let **Gordon Solie** do localized commentary for **WCW** television shows in **Florida** to boost attendance at live shows -- an idea not approved until last week (see **WCW** news in this issue). When **Dave Meltzer** of *The Wrestling Observer Newsletter* suggested **The Road Warriors** turn on **Sting** in 1988, **NWA** match-maker **Dusty Rhodes** was furious, because he reportedly had the same idea.

But if *Three Count* readers have any suggestions for wrestling storylines, I would be glad to head them (and possibly run them in a special section as well).

The Barbarian just doesn't have a program with another **WWF** wrestler at the moment, as he has spent much of his time wrestling in **Japan** for **Super World Sports**.

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Letters

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I could ramble all day about WCW's problems maintaining continuity. In my opinion, it results from poor management from WCW executive vice president **Jim Herd** and conflicting ideas of where the promotion is supposed to be headed. Herd says WCW wants to draw a larger demographic from children. So why does WCW make **Harley Race**, a wrestler most kids don't even remember, manager of the group's world champion? Or, my personal favorite, Herd's statement last April where he hoped **Oz** would draw fans from the 2 to 11-year-old age group. Not only did **Oz** debut as a bad guy, but how many kids today can relate to *The Wizard of Oz*? WCW loses top talent because of personal conflicts (**Ric Flair**), the inability to sign its talent to contracts (**Ricky Steamboat**) and because the lure of joining the WWF is so appealing to most wrestlers. In the case of the latter, some talent losses are not WCW's fault. **The Nasty Boys** and **Sid Justice** were offered deals by WCW that are substantially larger than what they are currently making in the WWF, but they decided to jump. But, as with the examples you listed, most of the problems are WCW's fault.

Koloff was brought into WCW with the guarantee of \$1,000 for each card he appeared upon. This six-month agreement worked fine for both parties until its conclusion in late August, at which time WCW wanted to slice **Koloff's** salary substantially. **Koloff**, who did not miss any of his scheduled dates and was being groomed for an autumn program with **Dustin Rhodes**, balked and was fired.

The Gang (**George Gray**) refused to lose a match to **P.N. News** and was fired. Not only is that drastic (a suspension would have been better warranted), but WCW wrestlers **Sting** and **Rick Steiner** have been refusing to lose matches for months and not received a single reprimand. **Gang** was listed as a participant in the **Chamber of Horrors** match at **Halloween Havoc**, and was scheduled to feud with **Sting** this fall.

The Hardliners situation gets even more ridiculous. **Dick Murdoch** and **Herd** dislike each other, and tensions got so great that the 'Liners were released. Now, **Scott Steiner** will return from his arm injury and have no one to get revenge on.

Also, WCW has approximately 10 different main events at live shows in November, none of which have to do with the **Lex Luger-Ron**

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Simmons feud. **Luger** is instead scheduled for matches against **Bill Kazmeier**, **Brian Pillman** and **Tom Zenk**, while nothing major is planned for **Simmons**. How can any momentum be built like that?

Dear Alex:

I've really enjoyed *Three Count* so far, and wanted to offer a few suggestions for future issues. 1) A column that tells whenever something related to wrestling is on television besides a wrestling show. Some examples are **Hulk Hogan's** appearances on *The Arsenio Hall Show* and anyone that is a guest on *Live With Regis and Kathy Lee*. One of the reasons people read your newsletter is to find out things about wrestling other than what is on normal television shows. 2) An occasional survey inserted into the newsletter to find out what readers want to see.

-- **Sergio Matsumoto, Miami**

AM: I will try to keep readers updated of wrestler's appearances on talk shows and the like. A survey is also being completed, and will be sent out in future issues.

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NWA FILES SUIT AGAINST FLAIR: BATTLE FOR BELT ENSUES

The National Wrestling Alliance has filed suit against "Nature Boy" Ric Flair in an attempt to regain possession of two former NWA title belts.

The suit was filed October 11 in the superior state court of Mecklenberg County in Charlotte, N.C. NWA attorney Faison Hicks attempted to have a temporary restraining order granted, restricting Flair from appearing on World Wrestling Federation telecasts with the NWA title and prohibiting him or any WWF employee from referring to the Nature Boy as a "world champion." District court judge Bob Johnston did not grant the motion. Another hearing is scheduled for November 7 in Charlotte.

Dennis Guthrie, Flair's Charlotte-based attorney, said Flair would return both title belts for \$50,200. That figure is the return of a \$25,000 deposit Flair gave WCW officer Jim Barnett for the old NWA title belt in the early 1980s, \$25,000 for the new belt and \$200 in interest. NWA legal counsel Bob Trobich could not comment, because he is not representing the NWA in this suit. Hicks would not return phone calls from *The Miami Herald*.

"This whole situation is rather humorous," Guthrie said. "(WCW executive vice president) Jim Herd, in particular, thinks the belt made Ric Flair, not that Ric Flair made the belt. They are grasping at straws.

"All this is going to do is elevate Flair and the WWF that much higher."

Flair has possession of the two most recent NWA title belts, and defended the title (now seen on WWF telecasts) as World Championship Wrestling kingpin since the company's inception in 1988. Flair was introduced to WWF fans by Bobby "The Brain" Heenan as the "real" world champion, with Heenan doing vignettes with the title belt prior to Flair's September debut.

Many in the wrestling business are uncertain just whose property the belt is. Flair has reportedly claimed it became his as part of a contract settlement with Jim Crockett Promotions. The older NWA belt is smaller than the newer one, which was made in 1986 while Flair was wrestling for Crockett.

"Why would we let the WWF use our property," asked Trobich. "Nobody there paid for it. We want both the belts back."

WWF spokesman Steve Planamenta said his employer will abide by whatever decision the North Carolina state court makes, and not try to legally fight whatever the decision is.

On October 4, the NWA decided to strip Flair of his championship status. Trobich, based out of Charlotte, said Flair was stripped of the title for violating NWA bylaws, and the group is currently evaluating the situation of the title. This contradicts a previous report by WCW announcer Jim Ross, who claimed Flair was stripped of the belt more than a month ago and WCW champion Lex Luger was the NWA's new top dog. It also gives added credibility to the report of a proposed match between Luger and USWA kingpin Jerry Lawler.

Another correction from a previous issue is the story behind the re-unification of the NWA. Promoters from the seven NWA members -- WCW, Keystone Promotions, Jim Crockett Promotions, National Wrestling Association/New Zealand, Australian Championship Wrestling and Mid-Pacific Promotions -- voted unanimously to appoint Herd NWA president, Steve Ricard vice president and Barnett secretary. Also, an article in the NWA bylaws was amended to read:

All NWA Championship Belts shall be owned and controlled by the NWA. The current NWA Champion shall deliver any such Championship Belt to the President immediately at any time requested by the President. Failure of the Champion to deliver any Championship Belt

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pursuant to this article shall be grounds for the Board's naming a World Champion. In the case of such failure, the Board shall use all legal means to obtain the return of the Championship Belt. Use of the Championship Belt for all purposes shall be in the absolute discretion of the board.

The next guideline is the most interesting, because it is what apparently swung the vote of four NWA promoters who voted to recognize Flair as NWA champion in July after he was fired by WCW (the passage is highlighted in bold).

The current NWA World Champion shall wrestle a minimum of four events per year for the member which has promoted the greatest number of wrestling events in the immediately prior calendar year, and shall wrestle at least one other series per year for another member. The World Champion shall wrestle such events at times and on such terms as directed by the President, so long as the World Champion is given 30 days prior notice. At all such events, the World Champion shall follow all directions of the Promoter. Any World Champion who fails to fulfill the obligations of this article shall be stripped of the World Championship and a new World Champion shall be named by the Board.

So, this means the next NWA champion will wrestle at least one show per year (probably more) for one of the remaining promoters. This might mean the re-opening of some wrestling territories (which would receive cooperation from WCW) or some new shows. A few months ago, this would have presented a problem had Luger been world champion, because his contract stated he did not have to wrestle outside of the U.S. or WCW. Since then, Luger's contract has been amended, with the "Total Package" receiving \$20,000 for each international appearance.

Tidbits: A major story is developing in the WWF, one we will have more details on next week. Sid Justice may have a torn biceps and require surgery for the injury, which would sideline him for at least six months (thus removing him from three WWF pay-per-view shows, and possibly Wrestlemania VIII). Justice will have the injury analyzed on 10/21. Randy Savage, who is supposed to be barred from wrestling in the WWF after losing a career match to The Ultimate Warrior last March at Wrestlemania VII, took Justice's place at live shows against Jake Roberts beginning last weekend. Savage wrestled under a mask as "Mr. Macho Man" the first night, and under his real name last Sunday at the Omni. I'm told the matches were pretty poor. Should Justice have a serious injury, expect Savage to be officially re-instated by the WWF. ... Paul E. Dangerously remains suspended by WCW. There will be an interview with Eddie Gilbert about the entire situation in next week's issue. ... Superstar Billy Graham, who was supposed to be interviewed in the Spotlight section of this week's issue, is unable to do the interview until after he files a lawsuit against the WWF, which should come any day now. ... Speaking of which, my major steroid story will be the focus of a special **Three Count** issue coming out next Tuesday. The story will appear in *The Miami Herald* next week as well. ... Dusty Rhodes will manage Ron Simmons at Halloween Havoc. ... Preliminary main event of WCW's Nov. 19 Clash of the Champions show is Barry Windham and Simmons vs. The Enforcers. The rest doesn't get much better, with matches that make no sense in WCW's jumbled match-making scheme. ... Almost another Von Erich tragedy over the past weekend, with Kerry Von Erich having his stomach pumped at the Baylor University hospital last Friday after an apparent overdose of demoral, according to The Wrestling Observer newsletter. Von Erich will miss his upcoming dates this weekend. ... The Van Hammer World Tour begins at the Omni on Thanksgiving night. Oh boy, I can't wait...

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The importance of Starrcade, though, began diluting with the Starrcade '89 "Future Shock" concept. Last year's Starrcade was a disappointment from both a wrestling and a financial standpoint, and was headlined by **The Black Scorpion** (Flair) vs. Sting. The show's inaugural tournament -- The Pat O'Connor Memorial Tag-Team Tournament -- was a flop, with no plans for The Steiner Brothers to defend any time soon the huge trophy they won. **Sharon Sidel**, spokesman for Turner Home Entertainment (the pay-per-view syndicator), said Starrcade may lose its status as WCW's flagship pay-per-view show, being replaced by the annual Super Brawl cards each May. She also said the Battle Bowl concept may become permanent for Starrcade as WCW attempts to develop a "flavor" for its pay-per-view shows (i.e. every Wrestle War will feature a War Games match, every Halloween Havoc a gimmick match, etc.).

"Hopefully, Battle Bowl will provide for some interesting and unique match-ups," Sidel said. "That is the selling point of the show. The primary purpose for this format is from a strategic standpoint. WCW does not want its house shows affected by the pay-per-view main event, and wants its fans to buy a certain format for each of its pay-per-view shows."

One plus for WCW is a tie-in with the Starlight Foundation (a charitable organization that helps provide "wishes" for dying children). An appearance by **John Candy** is being negotiated.

In my opinion, the Battle Bowl concept is a mistake. Pay-per-view shows with strong main events, even with a weak undercard, have traditionally drawn more orders than shows featuring tournaments. With the WWF in desperate need of a strong buy rate for its three shows, WCW had the chance to lure some fans away with a **Sting-Luger** headliner. And if WCW was forced into conducting a tournament on pay-per-view by those higher up in the **Ted Turner** organization, there are much better concepts. For example, invite only 16 wrestlers and conduct the random draw. Have Luger and Sting "randomly" chosen to team together, with Sting doing all the work in their tag-team match and Luger refusing to tag in. Sting could get the stuffing beat out of him, but still manage to win. Then, with four tag-teams remaining (eight wrestlers), break the tag-teams into a singles bracket. Sting could continue to get battered all the way to the final, where he would meet Luger. The Stinger would then be dominated the entire match, but manage to pin Luger and win whatever prize WCW would present. Luger and Sting matches could then headline around the country with some momentum. Instead, WCW's Battle Bowl concept will only appeal to hardcore wrestling fans who purchase every WCW pay-per-view card no matter what the main event is, and cause no reason for casual wrestling fans to miss the WWF's shows. Attendance at WCW house shows couldn't dip any lower by running a pay-per-view main event that is identical to the one at house shows. Plus, the WWF proved that philosophy was a myth by successfully running some **Hogan-Slaughter** matches prior to last April's **Wrestlemania VIII**. And if WCW house show attendance really did drop under such a scenario, why is WCW running numerous **Luger-Ron Simmons** matches prior to the main-event match up at Halloween Havoc?

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